



PARNASSUS

2014

THE LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE OF NORTHERN ESSEX COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WITH FEATURED GUEST AUTHORS

JUNOT DIAZ AND CARLOS CONTRERAS



- **COMMUNITY COLLEGE HUMANITIES ASSOCIATION**

First Place: 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009

Second Place: 2008

- **ASSOCIATED COLLEGIATE PRESS PACEMAKER AWARDS**

Best in Nation, Two-year Colleges: 2011

Finalist: 2013, 2009

- **COLUMBIA SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION**

Gold Crown: 2011

Silver Crown: 2010

- **AMERICAN SCHOLASTIC PRESS ASSOCIATION**

First Place with Merit: 2009, 2008

First Place: 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010

Best Gallery: 2008

Best Page Design: 2010

- **NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PARAGON AWARDS**

Gold: 2011

Silver: 2009

TABLE OF CONTENTS

6 HOMECOMING, WITH TURTLE
by Guest Author Junot Diaz

10 POEM FOR LAWRENCE
by Guest Author Carlos Contreras

12 '84
by Guest Author Carlos Contreras

14 SOMETHING DIFFERENT ...
by Guest Author Carlos Contreras

15 PHOTOGRAPH
by Luis Santana

16 ILLUSTRATION
by Erin Brent

18 THE COLOR BROWN
by Annejy Bailey

17 LIFE
by Samantha Titus

17 FREE
by Jay Biz

18 SONS OF EVE
by Muriel Lucia

19 PHOTOGRAPH
by Eli Portuhondo

19 PHOTOGRAPH
by Regina Papalia

20 BONES
by Wallace Clark IV

21 ARTWORK
by Kaleigh Baker

22 ARROW
by Timothy Vermette

24 FLOWERS IN THE RIVER
by Wallace Clark IV

25 PHOTOGRAPH
by Luis Santana

26 OUT OF WINTER
COMES DEATH
by Timothy Vermette

27 PHOTOGRAPH
by Luis Santana

28 PHOTOGRAPH
by Kiara Pichardo

29 PHOTOGRAPH
by Kiara Pichardo

30 PHOTOGRAPH
by Kiara Pichardo

30 PHOTOGRAPH
by Cynthia Jastrem

31 THE WITCH'S WALTZ
by Wallace Clark IV

32 STRAWS
by Joshua Chapman

34 BOTTLE GINGER
by Peter Neverette

36 AN OCTOPUS HAS
THREE HEARTS
by Dylan McDougall

38 ARTWORK
by Clifford Pierre Louis

MI PRIMER BESO
by Clare Thompson-Ostrander

ARTWORK
by Clifford Pierre Louis

ARTWORK
by Karen Melisi

PHOTOGRAPH
by Luis Santana

44 TWO FLAT LINCOLNS
by Clare Thompson-Ostrander

46 THE CLIMB
by Justin Merced

48 A MATTER OF TIME
by Everson Taveras

PHOTOGRAPH
by Kiara Pichardo

51 ARTWORK
by Karen Melisi

**CONTRIBUTOR
BIOGRAPHIES**

**PARNASSUS
STAFF AND
HOW TO
CONTRIBUTE**



guest author



JUNOT DIAZ


was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in New Jersey. He is the author of the critically acclaimed *Drown; The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which won the 2008 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award; and *This Is How You Lose Her*, a New York Times bestseller and National Book Award finalist. He is the recipient of a MacArthur “Genius” Fellowship, PEN/Malamud Award, Dayton Literary Peace Prize, Guggenheim Fellowship, and PEN/O. Henry Award. A graduate of Rutgers College, Díaz is currently the fiction editor at *Boston Review* and the Rudge and Nancy Allen Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



HOMECOMING, WITH TURTLE

That summer! Eleven years ago, and I still remember every bit of it. Me and the girlfriend had decided to spend our vacation in Santo Domingo, a big milestone for me, one of the biggest, really: my first time “home” in nearly twenty years. (Blame it on certain “irregularities” in paperwork, blame it on my threadbare finances, blame it on me.) The trip was to accomplish many things. It would end my exile—what Salman Rushdie has famously called one’s dreams of glorious return; it would plug me back into that island world, which I’d almost forgotten, closing a circle that had opened with my family’s immigration to New Jersey, when I was six years old; and it would improve my Spanish. As in Tom Waits’s song “Step Right Up,” this trip would be and would fix everything.

Maybe if I hadn’t had such high expectations everything would have turned out better. Who knows? What I can say is that the bad luck started early. Two weeks before the departure date, my novia found out that I’d cheated on her a couple of months earlier. Apparently, my ex-sucia had heard about our planned trip from a mutual friend and decided in a fit of vengeance, jealousy, justice, cruelty, transparency (please pick one) to give us an early bon-voyage gift: an “anonymous” letter to my novia that revealed my infidelities in excruciating detail (where do women get these memories?). I won’t describe the lío me and the novia got into over that letter, or the crusade I had to launch to keep her from dumping me and the trip altogether. In brief, I begged and promised and wheedled, and two weeks later we were touching down on the island of Hispaniola. What do I remember? Holding hands awkwardly while everybody else clapped and the fields outside La Capital burned. How did I feel? All I will say is that if you fused the instant when heartbreak occurs to the instant when one falls in love and shot that concoction straight into your brain stem you might have a sense of what it felt like for me to be back “home.”




As for me and the novia, our first week wasn't too bad. In one of those weird details that you just couldn't make up, before leaving the States we had volunteered to spend a week in the Dominican Republic helping a group of American dentists who were on a good-will mission. We would be translating for them and handing them elevators and forceps and generally making ourselves useful. Even with the advantage of hindsight, I can't figure out why I thought this was a good way to kick off a homecoming, but that's just how we thought back then. We were young. We had ideals.

Our group of five dentists and five assistants treated roughly fourteen hundred kids from some of the poorest barrios in the city of La Romana (which is, ironically, the sugar capital of the D.R.). We weren't practicing the kind of dentistry that First Worlders with insurance are accustomed to, either; this was no-joke Third World care. No time or materials for fillings. If a tooth had a cavity, it would be numbed and pulled, and that was that. Nothing else we can do, our chief explained. That week, I learned more about bombed-out sixes, elevators, and cowhorns than a layperson should ever have to know. Of our group, only me and the novia could be said to speak any Spanish. We worked triage, calming the kids, translating for everybody, and still we had it easy, compared with the dentists. These guys were animals; they worked so hard you would have thought they were in a competition, but by the thousandth patient even their hands started to fail. On the last day, our chief, an immensely compassionate Chinese-American with the forearms of a major-league short-stop, was confronted with one extraction he just couldn't finish. He tried everything to coax that kid's stubborn molar out of its socket, and finally he had to call over another dentist, and together they pulled out a long bloody scimitar of a six. During the ordeal the twelve-year-old patient never complained. ¿Te duele? we asked every couple of minutes, but he would shake his head fiercely, as though the question annoyed him.

Tu eres fuerte, I said, and that might have been the first sentence I had conjugated correctly all week. No, he said, shaking his beautiful head, no soy.

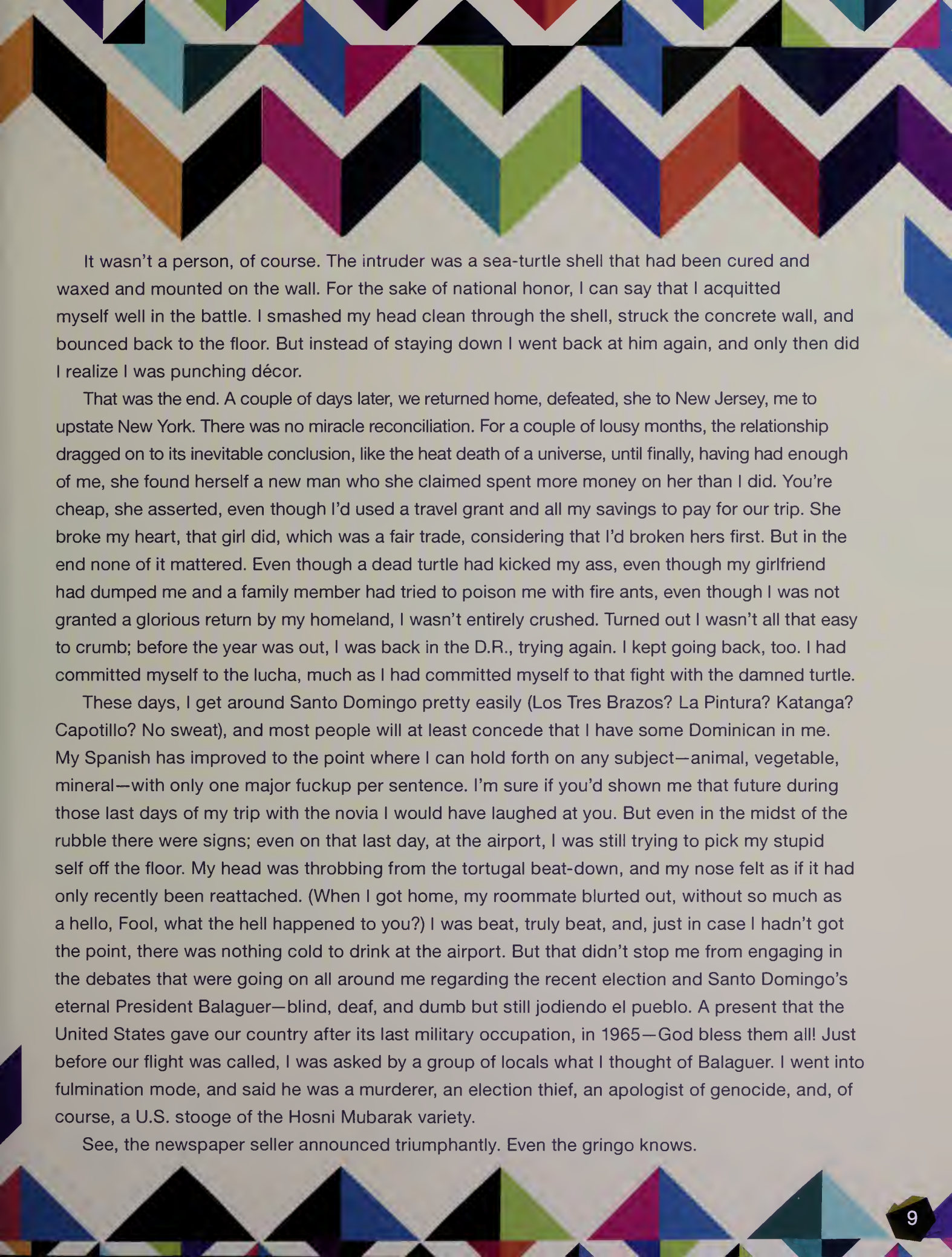
Of course, we fought, me and the novia—I mean, the needs of the pueblo aside, I had just been bagged fucking some other girl—but it was nothing too outrageous. For one thing, we were too busy wrenching teeth. It wasn't until the mission was over and the dentists had packed their bags and we had headed out into the rest of the island that our real troubles began.



I don't know what I was thinking. Travelling the Third World is challenging enough as it is, but try it with a girlfriend who is only just realizing how badly she's been hurt and a boyfriend who is so worried that he no longer "fits in" at "home" that every little incident and interaction is sifted for rejection, for approval—a boyfriend who is so worried about his busted-up Spanish that he fucks up even more than normal. What I wanted more than anything was to be recognized as the long-lost son I was, but that wasn't going to happen. Not after nearly twenty years. Nobody believed I was Dominican! You? one cabdriver said incredulously, and then turned and laughed. That's doubtful. Instead of being welcomed with open arms, I was overcharged for everything and called un americano. I put us on all the wrong buses. If there was money to lose, I lost it; if there was a bus to catch, I made us miss it, and through some twist of bad luck all my relatives were in the States for the summer. The one relative we did manage to locate, a great-aunt, had been feuding with my moms since 1951, when Mami had accidentally broken her only vase, and my arrival signalled a new stage in the age-old conflict: each morning, she blithely served me and the novia sandwiches completely covered in fireants.

Now that we didn't have the dentists to hold us back, we basically went off the deep end. We fought about everything: where to eat, what town we should visit, how to pronounce certain words in Spanish. We fought our way across the country: from La Capital to San Cristóbal to Santiago to Puerto Plata and back. It was miserable. If one of us wasn't storming off down the road with a backpack, the other one was trying to hitch a ride to the airport with strangers. Our craziness culminated one night in a hotel in Puerto Plata when the novia woke up and cried out, There's someone in the room! If you've never heard those words being shouted into your dreams, then yours has been a blessed life. I woke in a terrible fright and there he was—the intruder we'd all been waiting for.

It's at a crossroads like this that you really learn something about yourself. There was someone in the room with us, and I could have done any number of things. I could have frozen, I could have screamed for help, I could have fled, but instead I did what my military father had beaten into us during his weekend toughening-up exercises: no matter what the situation, always attack. So I attacked. I threw myself with a roar at the intruder.



It wasn't a person, of course. The intruder was a sea-turtle shell that had been cured and waxed and mounted on the wall. For the sake of national honor, I can say that I acquitted myself well in the battle. I smashed my head clean through the shell, struck the concrete wall, and bounced back to the floor. But instead of staying down I went back at him again, and only then did I realize I was punching décor.

That was the end. A couple of days later, we returned home, defeated, she to New Jersey, me to upstate New York. There was no miracle reconciliation. For a couple of lousy months, the relationship dragged on to its inevitable conclusion, like the heat death of a universe, until finally, having had enough of me, she found herself a new man who she claimed spent more money on her than I did. You're cheap, she asserted, even though I'd used a travel grant and all my savings to pay for our trip. She broke my heart, that girl did, which was a fair trade, considering that I'd broken hers first. But in the end none of it mattered. Even though a dead turtle had kicked my ass, even though my girlfriend had dumped me and a family member had tried to poison me with fire ants, even though I was not granted a glorious return by my homeland, I wasn't entirely crushed. Turned out I wasn't all that easy to crumb; before the year was out, I was back in the D.R., trying again. I kept going back, too. I had committed myself to the lucha, much as I had committed myself to that fight with the damned turtle.

These days, I get around Santo Domingo pretty easily (Los Tres Brazos? La Pintura? Katanga? Capotillo? No sweat), and most people will at least concede that I have some Dominican in me. My Spanish has improved to the point where I can hold forth on any subject—animal, vegetable, mineral—with only one major fuckup per sentence. I'm sure if you'd shown me that future during those last days of my trip with the novia I would have laughed at you. But even in the midst of the rubble there were signs; even on that last day, at the airport, I was still trying to pick my stupid self off the floor. My head was throbbing from the tortugal beat-down, and my nose felt as if it had only recently been reattached. (When I got home, my roommate blurted out, without so much as a hello, Fool, what the hell happened to you?) I was beat, truly beat, and, just in case I hadn't got the point, there was nothing cold to drink at the airport. But that didn't stop me from engaging in the debates that were going on all around me regarding the recent election and Santo Domingo's eternal President Balaguer—blind, deaf, and dumb but still jodiendo el pueblo. A present that the United States gave our country after its last military occupation, in 1965—God bless them all! Just before our flight was called, I was asked by a group of locals what I thought of Balaguer. I went into fulmination mode, and said he was a murderer, an election thief, an apologist of genocide, and, of course, a U.S. stooge of the Hosni Mubarak variety.

See, the newspaper seller announced triumphantly. Even the gringo knows.

GUEST

POEM FOR LAWRENCE

Straddling two sides of the country
I wondered what it meant
when I was in the middle of it,
in the middle of life changing
around me,

life changing,
it was.

I was surprised by the fact
that so far away I could find
things so familiar - and I don't mean
faces, but rather,
place - not physical
but emotional and experiential
perhaps this experience
meant more to me, than them...
Something tells me not - perhaps
equally important. Inside I saw
them as pieces
of what is inside of me: dreams,
goals, hopes - and a field from which
to grow all these things - yes, even in a desert -
something they see as worlds away
as leaves change like the days, where they are from
and they fall victim to the
circumstance of surroundings
like I see happen here, with everything that surrounds
me.

Carlos Contreras

Lawrence

we are two cities of difference

but so much of the same, I am still bewildered
by how you are so far away - and I promise though,
to hold you close.

It isn't something easy to let go, when you see
a sister-city, with so much hope - all dressed up with
seemingly nowhere to go -

stood up at the ball,

but we are dancing anyway, please believe
out here in Albuquerque we use our feet
like you do - we move, forward
no matter how things are pushing us back, and
otherwise to the margins, marginalized we will not be,
Important - yes, WE, are!

Our hearts, the beat to songs

dissimilar in an entertaining melody

kind of way, and so let's sing, together

like we forgot the song, but Jazz is a strong

point so strike up the band

and let's have a ball... Lawrence

it isn't over -

we shall have the last dance.

3rd born,
son.

Arrived early
Like my father taught us
2 months.

Almost didn't survive
But had to
Responsibility
To carry the legacy of
2 others
womb worn,
weathered
warriors, succumbing to breathe
one, death after life,
one death before,

Life
Is interesting in these ways.

In the things it chooses to embrace
Those that it leaves behind

And those that we carry:
Baby shoes
Locks of hair
Magazines
Ammo boxes
High school year books
Maintenance records

Non-descript pieces to a puzzle
Like children to families
Not always at first
Seemingly fitting

They always have the weird kid.

I was him.
84'-96'
green shirt orange pants
kind of kid
opportunities for ridicule were never missed.

The voice of reason
That was him,
Middle son – level head,
hefty bank account at 16,
Reflection of the seed, seen as
Hard working,
responsible, successful.

80's
baby
1st born, hell-torn,
crazy
that was him.
Everything we never did,
we learned from, him;
And mom, a belt, or lecture.

A story,
With morals,
lives' with a point
It's what they wanted for us
To want for ourselves and now we do.

To this day,
I admire the other two
and WE, live for the
Other Two.

Mom doesn't forget them,
We ink them into our memories
And pray in our own ways.

84'
86'
88'

Three swings at creating something
and each time different

A little bit
Of the bitty beast that raised
Us and her husband,
We carry with us.

Say yes please
and No Thank you
there's a place for everything
and everything in it's place

what's mine is yours
and what's other's not always mine,
arrive early, or at least on time.



WUTHOR

SOMETHING DIFFERENT...

Neruda says things, twists them in
Ways we can't even begin to explain,
We just know they mean something different.

On the sweaty smalls of backs
and in the palms of hands
words hold weight, more than the
ocean holds water, and we shouldn't forget this,
Here.

Space gets reinterpreted in a manner
deserving of more than one body
time without hands just a breathe
a dream, a way to explain nothing
from something different.

We don't understand,
And never will the intricacies that make
us who we are, so we ought to stop trying
and just be, simple
unscathed and unclothed
naked to the world of answers

stop questioning the impossible,
the impractical
and just do it anyway,
we ought to.

Today – sing in the face of that that has kept us
Silent for oh so long. Listen.

If words fall on these pages
and nobody is around to read them
do they matter?

Do they matter like you and I?
Like the blood that divides us,
the rings and the ribs that confine us
and call us human, ugly, simple,
simply –

Listen, instead
To the harmonies inside yourself
Put there by the distance between
breathe and fingertips...

feel that 12-cylinder engine
beneath your collarbone,
we, are home, within ourselves
unwrapped and unholy,
human and beautiful for no one else to see.

But you, Me, Us...

A communion of misunderstanding
and confusion
no answers, simply questions
re-written so that they inspire something
other than tears,
something more than cherry blossoms
and spring, something more than Neruda
and Dylan, Marley, and Whitman,
something tangibly
different.





Luis Santana



Erin Brent



THE COLOR BROWN

Annejy Bailey

My color,
A beauty misunderstood,
Prone to depression from the elements or,
Not enough sun exposure,
Just the sufficient amount of
Melanin,
Not too bubbly,
But just about the sass,
Every part of honesty,
And truth that society still,
Don't understand,
Love that is tested and
Questioned,
Love that governs and presses on
Loyalty,
All too often love is met with
Hard lessons,
A laughter in the face of the ridiculers,
Who knows all the wrong conclusions,
The color brown,
Ought not to be denied,
Or lied to,
Hidden or bleached on,
It is for the world,
To celebrate and
Embrace,
The diversity of the human Race,
It's here young girls have no fear,
It's America,
It's the legacy of our slaves
Of the Americas,
And the Caribbean
Of rich color and flavors,
It's in a dance,
A music of drums and
Electronic beats,
It's what we've grown to love,
So start by loving yourself,
The color brown...

LIFE

Samantha Titus

Rise,
Dress,
Learn,
Job,
Study,
Cook,
Eat,
Clean,
Repeat.

FREE

Jay Biz

I want to be free
As the flower falls
From the tree
Of life it seems.
Or the stream
Cascading toward an end.
Maybe as the light
Springs from the dawn.
Perhaps as a breeze
Changes from North to East.
Or how I feel in your arms
Content and at ease.
I want to be free.

SONS OF EVE

Muriel Lucia

How dare you,
Sons of Eve
Desecrate the Temple of
Your birth

With what heart can you
Succumb to greed and take
What does not belong to you?

In what state of mind can you
Shame your mothers and
Tear your sisters inside out?

Is that how you were raised?

The steal, to wound
To think of no mind
But your own?

How dare you
Sons of Eve
Desecrate her human right
And state so proudly
It belongs to you?

Mary,
Mother of Grace
Where is the Love
Your son bestowed upon us?

And are Her Children
Even worth Redemption?



Eli Portuhondo

Regina Papalia



BONES

Wallace Clark IV

When I heard your voice
It went through me like an arrow
& when the flint went in
It landed deep in my marrow

But I did not shudder
I didn't squint or flinch
I closed not my eyes
I did not turn nor wince

But as time winds by
The heart gets hard as granite
With the loss & with such thoughts as:
"I took you for granted"
Then there comes a water
That halves the stubborn stone
Do you know what it is like
To feel Love in your bones?



An abstract graphic on a solid red background. It features several thick, dark arrows pointing towards a central point, creating a starburst effect. The arrows are in various orientations, some pointing towards the top left, others towards the center. The word "ARROW" is written in a white, stylized, outlined font to the right of the starburst.

ARROW

Timothy Vermette

The archer takes an arrow
from her quiver
and draws it back along the bowstring
taking steady aim at her prey
for where his flesh
is most vulnerable

She looks him up and down
then fixates her icy cold glance
upon his beating heart
and now satisfied with her target
draws the arrow further back
and aims for the kill

Now her prey
pathetically tells her
a deep secret from within his heart
and thus implores her
for an answer
to his request

The archer lowers her bow
and replaces the look to kill
with a more sinister half-smile
then walks over to him
and removes something from her pocket

She takes the item
and wraps it around his head
covering his eyes
then she whispers something in his ear
as an answer to his earlier imploring
and then just to tease him
kisses him fully on the lips

She then returns
to the shooting range
aiming for his open heart
then without further delay
releases the bowstring
and lets the arrow
give way to the kill

The arrow strikes
within his breast
to where his open heart lay
and although it would normally kill him
he just moans in great pain

Now the archer looks
upon his dying body
and gives a look of disgust
goes over to him
and further crucifies
his bleeding heart

Then once she is finished
she removes the blindfold
and looking deeply into his closed eyes
kisses him fully on the lips
and cries for the loss of him

FLOWERS IN THE RIVER

Wallace Clark IV

I crumbled up the dirt
I reduced the clod with my fingers
One voice says you're gone
Another voice that you linger

You weren't supposed to fit me
We were a circle & a square
I was told I should forget you
But I was not prepared

Do you know that feeling--
When you've got to cuss or bite your nails?
Well, when I think of the light in your Idaho sized eyes
It pales it pales it pales.

There was a time when I feared
That I would never be delivered
But now as I still Love you
It's like putting flowers in the river



Luis Santana

OUT OF WINTER COMES DEATH

Timothy Vermette

I look outside
to find the grey setting in,
and even through these walls
I can feel it in the wind;
she is coming for me

I can't escape her this time;
too many times have I
cheated on her and
run away when I
felt she was nigh.
But tonight, no more;
for she will finally get
her everlasting vengeance on me

Even now, I can feel her
getting closer. She glides in
through the door, down the
hall, to the room in where
I dwell, and silently comes forth

I can feel her cold hand
upon my shoulder; I see
my body turn blue by her touch
Here it is that her revenge will
take place; through her lips
her icy poison will consume me
and in silence will the deed be done

So here it is that I bid
my farewell, for tonight
my world turns black,
while this one turns white



Luis Santana





Kiara Pichardo

Kiara Pichardo



Cynthia Jastrem



THE WITCH'S WALTZ

Wallace Clark IV

The Sun dumped out its last cup of light
& tonight even the Moon was frightened
so it stayed tucked under the covers of clouds
& showed only half its face;
enough for one pale stone
to mirror many others--

A romantic scene for the necromancer.

A hundred years separates this cold place from any proper road,
though, SHE knows the way to go.

Here the trees' bark curls like wall paper in a condemned house,
& hangs like curtains gnawed by moths & Time.

The Sun dumped out its last cup of light,
Her heart was thunderously pumping living wine,

& all of Night was a mouth longing for a drink.
Now, blessedly bereft of the day beam & left with silhouettes,
she ties up her hair with black ribbon fingers,

& lets the wind caress her neck.

She moves through the dank of that yard
not like a tiger stalking sleek & low,

but flickering & tall,
like altar candles parading shadows across an all but empty room.

Her eyes are summoning circles,

the hole with which she speaks is a kettle where spells brew,

A confident conjurer, she shows her form
much more than an orb,

course & black, but mortal.

There in the sacred darkness,


she hovers over the doors of the dead,

& worships the gorgeous corpses beneath the forest floor.

STRAWS

Joshua Chapman

Back in high school, we used to perform an exercise
In which we would breathe through a straw for a whole minute
To feel the pain that someone feels when they have emphysema
But I don't smoke I told myself, I will never feel this again
She had auburn hair and eyes that spoke of spring
She was mine, I was in love, and she was one of the most beautiful creatures
I have ever seen in my life.
Then she was taken from me, it's childish, but I just have to ask.
How does she breathe when I am in the room?
Do her lungs sink down to her abdomen to dance with her stomach
And lay down with her belly button to carve the word voluptuous into her thighs
Does her rhythm repeat his when he has her wrapped in his arms, or does it
Take beats that skip and beats that can't look
Through brown eyes trying to tell her I am a man who is sinking
I breathe, like I am breathing out through a straw
A straw that makes it hard to gasp for air
And restrict my words to try and say something or try to quote a phrase
So sweet and so sincere that she might revoke
Him, I can't say anything and I choke
Or does she even take note?
Stuck to my chair I cannot bear
To see her with him one more minute but my straws
My straws they don't bend, they aren't that kind
All I want is for them to end because I could put a smile on her face
If the one she was already wearing wasn't so perfect, perfect for her
Perfect for him, perfect for me and I listen to the crowd
undeterred saying



You could do so much better, and I could do that much better but
Then better wouldn't be her, and her would be heaven, and heaven
Is about only 12 inches away when we all sit at the same tables and laugh
About how much fun it is to be in a relationship, the only relationship I want
Is with her, with you, relationships hurt, they do.
If I could cough up my straw and make my words dance around her head
Like those stars in old cartoons we used to watch as children
Then I would call her, and ask her to sleep in my bed
We would trick the sand man and
Talk all night about what she loves, and how we have so much in common
And she would be so soft and sweet, and flirty and we would.
And she will laugh like she always does when he touches her
We would hold each other so close, in an embrace so warm and tender
And we wouldn't let go until the dawn came
And we would greet it in all its warmth and splendor

BOTTLE GINGER

Peter Neverette

The bottle ...

Oh god, the bottle, again?

I sat on a cold metal seat, shoulder to shoulder with strangers, ankle to ankle with shopping bags and brief cases. The T shook, shimmied, and wailed its way through dim lit tunnels. I pulled my arms close to enlarge my bubble of space, my eyes fixed on the woman across from me.


Lap, hover, lips. Lap, hover lips.

She was a fake ginger, black and gray roots fading into an Elmo colored dye job. Her face was wrinkled and life worn, weathered by odyssey's I knew nothing about, her skin a diorama of burst blood vessels and only a shade lighter than her hair. In her hand, clutched tight, was a small pint still encased in its paper bag sarcophagus. Her grip never tightened, loosened, or shifted, and so the paper never crackled, blossoming out over her fist like sad flower petals, with a bottle neck stamen. Every few minutes she lifted it, hovered for a moment just below her nose, as if bracing herself, or perhaps allowing for a moment of introspection. Then she tilted it, a quick flick of her wrist, slight recline of her chin, and sipped. The cycle had remained static through my trip, a perpetual elliptical of decay, a manifest cycle of the degeneration of brain cells, and mortality.

Lap, hover, lips. Lap, hover lips.

She stared fixedly ahead of her, never looking left or right, as absent minded and yet determined as her morbid ritual. She was unaware of me, or any other person on the subterranean train, and so I watched her unabashedly fascinated.

Occasionally, as the T serpentine through passageways, I caught whiffs of the liquor as it drifted my way, and guessed it was a cheap whiskey or bourbon. I wondered what cataclysmic life had led her to this pinnacle of defeat, destitute of dignity, what horrible injustices she had suffered and, ultimately, surrendered to. The mounted lights outside the T added



illumination to the grey interior in
phosphorescent bursts, drawing shadows
across her grim straight lips and pooling in the
pouches beneath her eyes.

Lap, hover, lips. Lap, hover lips.

Speakers burst into static and a muted voice
announced my stop. Moments later the T, shrieking, slid to a
halt as if Hercules had thrown himself in front of it. The city
indigenous swayed like sea plants in the tide, feet spread, gripping
the iron rails, faces stoic. Tourists and the uninitiated stumbled or slid
seats. With a hiss the doors slid open and people and their bags moved onto
the platform, vomit out of a great iron maw. The bottle ginger, so dubbed, didn't
move, barely blinked as I reticently gathered myself, eyes still glued to her bourbon
cult obedience. Stepping out I turned and watched her from the platform, watched as
the doors steamed closed again, and felt a twinge of sad finality. Where was she going?
Anywhere at all? Surely she would cease to exist once the train powered out of sight, having
been only a ghost, a macabre remnant of a human being. As the train began its forward ascension, I
saw her through the plexi-glass window cycle the bottle upwards, a last dark sacrament in deference to
my awe.

Lap, hover, lips. Lap, hover, lips..

I ascended the steps to street level, packed in with a trudging migration of bodies, salmon
up a waterfall. The sunlight blinded me in contrast to the dimness of the subway, and I
shielded my face against it, squinting upwards at the bright, bright blue. I thought
about the woman on the train with mixed feelings. From my waist band, cleverly
concealed, I pulled a leather wrapped steel flask, the exposed metal
fragmenting the sunshine. I posed with it a moment, just looking at it,
rubbing my fingers over the worn leather.

Lap, hover, lips. Lap, hover, lips...

I tossed it in a trashcan, deaf to the sound of displaced rubbish, and
walked steadily away.

AN OCTOPUS HAS THREE HEARTS

Dylan McDougall

An octopus has 3 hearts.

Me too:

One heart carefully crafted completely out of poems;
With meter-made-metaphors and a beat that
opens doors to my self-made,
and doubt-paved home.
It has windows of motivation
as clear as a page
before my writer's rage
makes it mine.

An octopus has 3 hearts,
and so do I.

With triangle veins that tangle and complain
like there's something else to prove;
I have half-a-heart stained with paint and pain,
and eraser residue, from you, in its grooves.

I have half-a-heart that grew from the trees;
Covered in finger-print memories,
and you can read all of my tragedies on the leaves.

An octopus has 3 hearts,
and there are 3 hearts in me.

I have one for writing, one for art,
and the one I'll keep fighting
before it falls apart
any faster than you could blink or doubt it.
But here's the way that I think about it:

An octopus has 3 hearts and 8 legs.
3 chances to love, and 8 to run away.
2 enhancers to pump the blood, and one to keep the rhythm the same;
To stop it from fading
or rearranging,
and to keep the other 2 from changing.

But in my mind,
I keep some things locked away,
and those things are things I'd like to say;
Like the other day when I was told that I have 206-or-so bones
in my body.
And that I've grown from everything that you've taught me,
and that even if my writing stays unknown,
Well, it's never gonna stop me.
Because I have the motivation and the heart
to make it to the top-seat.

Because if an octopus has 3 hearts, and 8 legs
just to maintain its sense of balance,
then why is it so hard for us to say
that with the one heart that beats within us every day,

That we, too, will accept the challenge?



MI PRIMER BESO

Clare Thompson-Ostrander

When Daddy got the wheelchair, Momma rented the other side of our two-family to a Puerto Rican couple with kids. They moved in the same week the newspapers ran stories about the carjackings.

I'd never seen a Puerto Rican woman up close before, but there she was round as an egg and wearing a kerchief in her hair. She was squawking around her husband and her son, waving her arms, showing them where to put the couch and only two beds when four of them were moving in. Some of their stuff wasn't even packed into boxes. Dresses and shirts filled the daughter's arms. Sandals hung from her brown fingers.

Momma and I watched them from the bay window. It snowed the night before making the move a slippery mess.

"It's-s-s a m-m-mistake," my father said.

"They're good people. They've only been here five months," said Momma.

Clifford Pierre Louis

She tucked a blanket around Daddy's legs, pushed his wheel chair in front of the television and told him my worker's permit was all set.

I was 14 years-old. The next day I was to start my new job at the Big A's Discount. Before the MS made his body shake, Daddy sold flooring to the owner of Big A's. I guess the guy owed him a favor.

"What do I do there, Daddy?"

"You just sh-sh-show up and work hard, ok-k-k-ay kiddo?"

The MS had taken Daddy's word muscles, too..

"They're cl-cl-closing in on the car-j-j-jackers," Daddy said, pointing his good finger to the front page of the newspaper.

Momma knew the Puerto Rican girl, Masiel. She was in special classes for aliens because her English was so bad. Momma was a Spanish teacher and she tutored Masiel three times a week at the high school. That's how they knew about renting our place. We needed money and they needed a home, so Momma told them to move in with us.

"Masiel's very bright," I heard her telling Daddy.

"Wh-Wh-What's this neighborhood coming to when we have to worry about c-c-carjackings and renting our home to aliens?"

Masiel had an older brother, Miguel. He saw us watching him, his breath rising in clouds as he lifted the heaviest boxes and carried them into the other side of our home.

The father and mother spoke no English at all, so Daddy said they sat on their asses all day, but that made no sense to me because Masiel's mother was always cleaning. Momma told her it was too cold to hang laundry outside, but the mother just smiled and Masiel clamped another wet shirt to the clothesline. Later that night, the clothes were coated with ice. Miguel may have been a teenage boy, but he broke those clothespins free with the force of a man.

"I'll tell them about the dryer in the morning," Momma said.

"Over my dead b-b-body," said Daddy.

Arthur was a fat man and he didn't remember Daddy at all. When I showed him my worker's permit, he told me special cases never let him down, "You're pretty to look at, too; you a hard worker?"

His words felt ugly, so I looked at the pile of dresses and the box of plastic hangers and the long metal pole that went across the stockroom. Arthur told me some immigrant girl would show me what to do and in walked Masiel. I smiled at her, but she was all business. She showed me how to use the price gun and I figured out the rest. We spent the four hours of our shift in the stockroom hanging dresses and piercing them with the price gun. Hanging and piercing, hanging and piercing until Miguel scared the life out of us. He popped into the storage room and moved his head from side to side like he was robbing a bank; then from under his shirt, he pulled a stolen bag of marshmallows and dangled it in the air like it was a sack of money. He smiled as he ripped into the bag with his utility knife, "Para ti y su nueva amiga bonita."

Masiel smiled at me for the first time and stuffed her cheeks with marshmallows. I popped two in my mouth and shoved three into my pocket.

When our shift ended, Arthur told us it was time to go home.

Momma waited for me in the car, "How'd it go?"

"Fine, I guess. That girl works there, too." I pointed to Masiel standing below the Big A sign. The night was moonless, ready for more snow.

"Oh my goodness, she's wearing those sandals on a night like this." My mother rolled down the car window, "Masiel! Por favor, déjanos llevarte a tu casa."

But, just then, Miguel walked out of Big A's and stood next to his sister.

"Por favor, Miguel, me estoy congelando," Masiel whispered, shivering.

He was nothing like he was in the stockroom; no smiling, just sharp edges and heat when he told Momma they'd walk home.

On the drive home, I told Momma, "I bet they don't know about the carjackings."

"Lock your door right now," Momma said.

Snow dotted our windshield and I thought of Miguel and Masiel walking over the snow banks in the



Clifford Pierre Louis

dark. I imagined Miguel ripping into the carjacker's chest with his utility knife and I knew he'd keep Masiel safe.

"Why does Daddy hate them, Momma?"

"He doesn't hate them," she said, tousling my hair with her fingers.

"Momma?"

"Yes, baby?"

"I'm starting to forget Daddy."

Momma was quiet as snow. She pulled the car to the side of the road and parked near a snow bank. She pulled me in close to her so that my head rested on her shoulder and told me the story I'd heard a million times, "When I met your Daddy, he was driving 1979 black Trans Am. It had a picture of a gold Phoenix across the whole hood; the thing had these huge talons, like it'd rip your heart out if you tried to slow that bird down. Your Daddy was like that. He drove the wheels off that car, my phoenix."

"Did you ride in the car?"

"I had my first kiss in that car," she said, grinning.

The next night, Momma was upstairs with Daddy. The new medication wiped him out. More snow fell and I watched from the window as Miguel pulled the frozen clothespins from the line again. Masiel was with him this time, hopping up and down like a baby bird to keep warm. She turned back to look at me and I waved. It was hard to tell, but I think she pointed at me, too, so I put on my jacket and boots and walked out to them.

I motioned with my hands for them to follow me. In the basement, I showed them the dryer, opened the door, and shoved the pile of frozen clothes Masiel held in her arms into the machine.

She looked at her brother. He nodded.

Masiel already knew how to turn the knobs and she shut the dryer door.

She clapped her hands and laughed. Her brown skin glowed under the fluorescent lights and her black hair circled around her neck. Miguel swept her into his arms and danced her around the room; then, he reached for me, put his hands around my waist and I felt his breath in my ear.

Masiel told me, "Mi hermano dice que tu eres bonita."

She couldn't stop laughing. "Beso, beso, beso," she said, stretching her arm in front of her, kissing her skin over and over, pointing at her brother and me.

Miguel made his eyes go big and my cheeks burned red.

This made them both laugh and laugh until I reached for Miguel and plugged his mouth with my hand to make him stop. He pulled away at first, but then he pointed to the dryer, looked into my eyes, and said, "Gracias, amiga bonita."

His cold fingers were in my hair and his hips lined up with mine when he gathered me in close. I closed my eyes and my heart, a bag of feathers when our lips met.

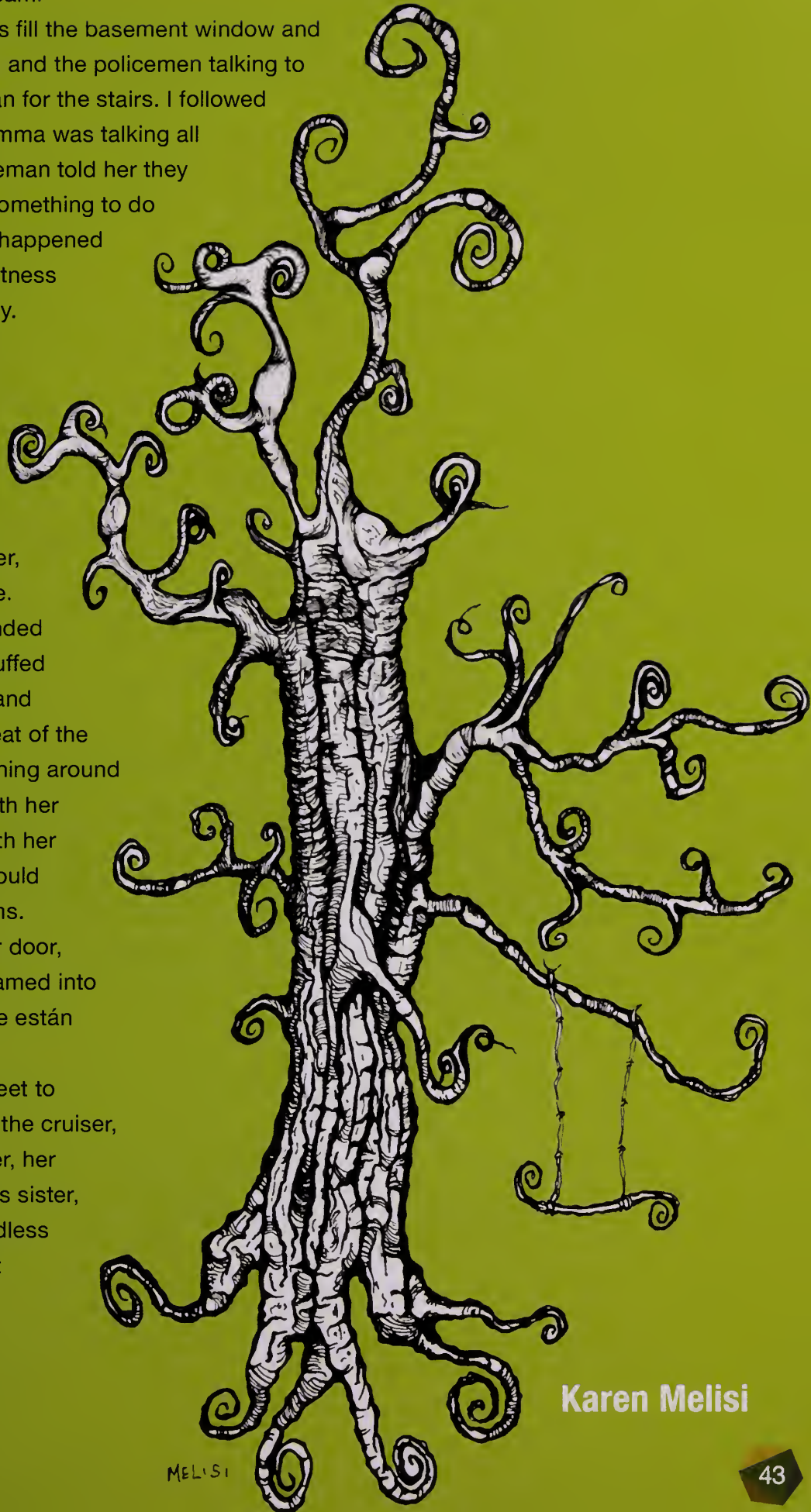
But our kiss cracked like a dream.

We saw the red and blue lights fill the basement window and we heard their mother screaming and the policemen talking to Momma. Miguel let me go and ran for the stairs. I followed him to the front porch where Momma was talking all frantic to a policeman. The policeman told her they wanted Miguel for questioning, something to do with the carjacking, the one that happened in the last hour. He said an eyewitness saw a Dominican running this way.

"He's Puerto Rican," Momma said. "He's been home all night."

Miguel didn't understand, so Momma translated for him. Her Spanish words took all of his color. His eyes went from me, to Momma, to his own mother, who was still screaming his name. Snowflakes he couldn't touch landed in his hair when the policeman cuffed Miguel's hands behind his back and ducked his head into the back seat of the cruiser. Miguel's mother was running around the cruiser, pounding its hood with her palms, scratching at the paint with her fingernails; doing anything she could to drag her boy back into her arms. When the policeman shut the car door, she pulled at her chest and screamed into the snow, "Ayúdame Dios mío! Se están llevando mi niño!"

I ran into the middle of the street to watch Miguel in the back seat of the cruiser, turning his neck to see his mother, her deflated arms by her side, and his sister, whose eyes looked up at the Godless sky, and to see me with my heart burning in the snow.



MELISI

Karen Melisi



Luis Santana

TWO FLAT LINCOLNS Clare Thompson-Ostrander

We called our eighth-grade teacher Boom because she had no lady parts and a voice as deep as a manhole. No one liked her, so it was easy to ride her rails. Like today, Boom snatched the note I wrote to Isa and made like she was going to read it to the whole class, only too bad for her because the note was a trap, a train wreck waiting to happen.

"I see we have some secrets to share," she started, real smart, until my words bit her in the eyeballs: "Boom's a big-tit, fat-shit, itty-bitty bitch-kitty."

And boom-de-boom, two seconds later, in walked Sister Agnes, and I knew exactly where I was headed.

Sister Agnes hauled me down to Father Mike's final stop for girls. She told me not even Christ could help me once Father Mike got a hold of my wicked words. I sat on the bench outside Father Mike's office, swinging my ankles like I didn't give a bigtitfatshit.

My riff with Boom started two weeks ago.

Me, Isa and Fly were on the old railroad tracks, skipping over worn-out crossties and kicking up the ballast stones that were still white as teeth, all of us heading to our community service hour at Daisy Hill, the old folks home in town. We walked a small way before I bent in half to pick up a penny I found between the stones and crossties. That's when Fly piped up about how our uniforms barely fit, which always led to my top shelf. Hell, even Father Mike noticed the tittybumps under my sweater. One time I caught him looking in church, so I licked my lips like a porn star and his cheeks

flamed into a sin. We all laughed like unruly coolies, but then Isa dragged Boom into the mix, mouthing off on how Boom checked my top shelf, too. Fly and Isa busted a gut just thinking about Boom feeling me up with her fatmanfingers. I just stood there, dead in my tracks, curling that penny inside of my fist.

We got to Daisy Hill and Boom told us we had to interview an old lady and write some three-page essay. Farts and dentures covered every inch of that place, and there we were, me, Isa and Fly, talking to half-dead ladies with cloudy eyes and bones showing through their skin, but all I had in my head was Boom, my top shelf, and the penny in my fist.

My old lady's name was Lila. Lila with the long silver braid, Lila who still had all her teeth, Lila who's voice didn't shake with Camels the way Mama's did. Lila, smooth as steel tracks that went on forever, laid down story after story of the railroad in her day. She yapped on about when she was a teacher her students flattened pennies on those tracks to measure weight and distance. She remembered the wind in her hair as the train whizzed over the rails, and just like that, the penny I held in my fist spilled pictures into my brain and there she was as young as my own Mama, only prettier because I bet Lila would've put down the Jim Beam to make cupcakes on my birthdays, would've tucked me in with lullabies the way movie-screen moms tucked their kids in with lullabies. Only I didn't give twoshits about cupcakes or lullabies until I saw pictures of Lila moving across my skull. She was waving and laughing as kids like me snatched flattened pennies off the hot tracks.

I didn't tell Lila about the penny turning in my fist. I didn't tell her that she must've left this one behind. I just sat there like I didn't give two flat Lincolns, but that Lila looked me dead in the eyeballs and said, "You're a little piece of hell, aren't you?"

Father Mike called me into his office.

I didn't know where to look or what to say, so I stared at the cross-stitched sign framed above his desk. The sign read: "The direction we choose becomes the life we live." His office only caught shadows, and smelled of holy palms, and always made me feel like a blah-de-blah-bag of sin. Father Mike was standing next to the desk, facing the window and looking out at the rooftops, the smoke stacks, and the clotheslines like the one my Mama rigged from our apartment. I'd watch the same scene from my own windows on the nights Mama was out with her latest la-de-da. She'd tell me to not open the door for nothing, to get to bed early, to not come out until morning because the la-de-da might be on the couch in his boxers, but I'd still be there, even if they couldn't hear me breathing on the other side of wall. The la-de-da and Mamma, drunk and bumping uglies all night, and I'd still be there, slipping inside the nighttime noises and busting smack poems like the one I wrote to boom-de-boom Boom.

Father Mike cleared his throat and turned to look at me; his cheeks a normal cement color that day.

"We have an interesting request," he began.

Lila wanted to see me on the regular.

"She just might be the light you need," he said.

I closed my eyes and imagined the windy-wind in my hair.



THE CLIMB

Justin Merced

What is all of this? Only a moment ago were my wife, children, grandchildren, and friends surrounding me at the sides of my bed, but now I feel as if I am falling endlessly into some bizarre abyss. The space all around me is black and seems bare, but I can feel the pushes of air rushing past me as I plummet, and hear the deafening upheaval of wind enveloping me as I twist and turn ceaselessly. But amid each whirl, I notice a very small fragment of land far below me, which seems to become larger and larger the longer I fall, so I pray it will be my next, and final destination.

It feels as if ages have passed, but I have finally landed upon the speck of land: a strip of eight boulders, each one taller than the one before it, all set upon dead earth surrounded by darkness at its edges. Atop the highest boulder, I discern a solitary door standing upright and alone, and that door, I surmise, will set me on my path toward home. I begin my climb to the door, and after much strain and exertion, I am happy to have reached it, prepared to realize the final stage of my voyage. The door is overly cumbersome and appears ancient, like a relic one might imagine would have been used to bar captives from escape during the times of the Roman Empire. It has a devious blackness to its plumb panels, from which speckled patches of peeled and splintered underlying mahogany contrast its gloom; and centered on the door's facade is a gaudy, human-sized knocker, which has a round handlebar that protrudes from the nostrils of a black bull's head. I inspect the escutcheon bindings further and begin to contrive a plan that will undoubtedly match my expectations for what lies beyond the door's framework.



I can find no knob or lever with which to open the door, so I thrust apart from it the knocker and vehemently force it down with all of my might. I wait a moment, but there is no answer. I knock again, but still, there is no answer. I try to pry the door using only my arms and shoulders and legs, but it will not budge. I stop to rest my body a moment, but then suddenly comes three strong knocks from the other side of the door. I anxiously answer: "Yes, come in! No—Let me in! What is your name? Answer me! Answer me!" but there is no answer. I walk around to the other side of the door and try to pull it open and knock yet again, but still, there is no answer.

The knocking from behind the door begins again, yet much more quickly and vigorously, enough to make the cumbrous door shake and wobble, forcing shards of wood to the ground. I, too, continue to knock and bang and yell, but it still does not open, and there still is no answer. I scream, "Why do you forsake me! I have done everything a man can do! I am righteous! Why test me now?" The knocking behind the door ceases, and again, it is quiet.

That was the final time I had heard knocking from behind the door, and so I fear I must lie forevermore upon these stones. Thus, upon them I have evermore remained.





A MATTER OF TIME

Everson Taveras

Broken from sleep by the sound of heavy footsteps moving about in the living room, where my sister tore tape a new asshole and disputed with our mother if she was forgetting anything else—tampons, important papers, books she never read— it suddenly dawned on me that Natalie, my dear despotic, dictator-of-a-sister, was leaving. Of course, as common in these circumstances, I should have either been weeping or reminiscing over all the memories we shared in this house. Many of which I cannot disclose because she would kill me. But I wasn't saddened by her departure. Neither was I troubled by it. If anything, I should've been happy that she was leaving. Not because I didn't have to fight with or hear her sleep-talk anymore, which, for the record, was a traumatizing experience, as much for me as it was for her. Like two people who knew way too about each other, we were bound to have our differences. There was just no getting around it. So normally, one would be happy to see her finally doing the grown-up thing and finding a place of her own. But I wasn't happy or proud—and I couldn't explain why.

I thought "Fujian water" when I looked at the now empty walls my sister and I had shared for a year. How time has flown! Since then, she has gotten into a long-distance relationship with an unfathomable old friend our childhood named Alex; has owned a car she no longer drives and begun taking classes at Northern Essex Community College.

Everything from her calendars all the way to her two cheap and awful paintings have been removed from the walls. All that was left now was her light-blue cabinet and a bed she would leave behind. But as I looked around the room, I suddenly began to see what else she was leaving behind: a shuffled collection of shitty and good memories. She was leaving behind Monday night's filled with ABC's *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette*; driving my drunken self home from

a fight I didn't realize had even occurred until next morning; trips to a church she no longer attends but managed to get a full-time job out of; her 22nd birthday, unending fights with mom. But knowing Natalie, she would come back and take with her the good memories, and leave the bad ones to rot where they lay. She would find solace in the prospect that we would have a family dinner once a month. That would be enough for her.

The living room had Natalie scattered remains spread all over. In front of the TV, there was a garbage bag filled with clothes, so it didn't surprise me in the least when I saw that she had packed the rest of her belongings in a rectangular, cardboard box that read "Eggs" in bold letters. She also had a black suitcase that weighed like a dead body. Mom did what she could to help Natalie, going above and beyond as usual by doing everything my sister asked her not to. She packed extra stuff that Natalie didn't need, and, just like that, they began arguing. It was never clear to me the nature of their arguments, nor what they hoped to benefit from it. I'd simply walk away whenever they argued. Or I'd grab a seat and watch. Without question, I was really going to miss this family time.

Natalie's car was a mess. The red Volkswagen beetle was littered with books, flyers, plastic bags—I could've sworn I saw a rat in there somewhere. But maybe the mess wasn't her fault. After all, the car wasn't technically hers, although she drove it, filled it with gas and was now putting all her stuff in it. I don't know the full details of the arrangement, but she told me that the person with whom she would be staying with lent her the car. How generous they must be, I thought. Until I remembered they were followers of Christ.

In spite of the sewer that was manifesting in Natalie's car, we managed to fit all of her belongings inside. The car had now undergone a rapid and extreme change from anorexic to obese, leaving no space empty except for the driver's seat. Taking a step back from the car now, I asked, "Alright, so where am I sitting?"

She looked at me rather stupidly. "You're sitting up front in the passenger seat, of course." I looked at the passenger seat. That garbage bag I was looking at disapprovingly earlier was sitting in my spot.

With a long and giant trash resting on my lap, we drove off. As we arrived closer to our destination, Natalie pointed out obvious landmarks so I wouldn't forget where she lived. "And you're going to see this big yellow house and you're going to turn." There were two big yellow houses. "And the place where I'll be staying will be before the stop sign, on the left." She turned and pulled up to a driveway.

At first, I didn't know what to make of the place. The trees that stood outside of the house had grossly sized bumps; the grass looked as bad as a flower that had gone days without water. But the house itself wasn't as awful or sickly looking. It still had all the necessary things that a house should have— doors and windows, a roof. I didn't have to ask Natalie to know that she liked the place just so. She had always been like that, taking things for what they were and appreciating them. She was the kind that saw good in even the most coarse of things.

Ben, the owner of the house, was standing behind a caged fence that kept the dog from running free into the streets. His bad orange hair lay dully on his head. He wore glasses, and stood at about 6'2. Ben was as big in height as he was in weight. He waved his giant hand at us from where he stood, but my hands were occupied at the moment with the bag cradled in my lap..

"Hey, Everson!" said Ben. "Good to see you."

"Likewise," I said, after exiting the car. Our conversations never went past the formalities. I didn't want to end up in a situation where my faith would be tested, as it often was whenever I spoke to any religious folks. So I always did what I could to keep it brief and simple. It was best this way.

The inside of the house was pleasant, with floral wallpaper spread throughout. Natalie would be sleeping upstairs, in a small room of decent size. She had a bed to lay in, and a window to look out or open. Though it wasn't the glamorous "take a look at my new place" I was expecting, it was good to see her taking a chance on something as grand as this. After all these years, I saw now that she was beginning to regain the big sister role she had long left behind. Soon, I would need to make big changes, too. I just wasn't looking forward to any of them. Not like my sister.

We went back to mom's place to pick up what was left— a bicycle, her blue cabinet and a lamp. With the help of Natalie and Ben's friend, Chris, who drove a pickup truck in which we would load what remained of Natalie's belongings, we left the house as soon as we came. Ben had plenty to say about basketball and his undying loyalty to the Boston Celtics when we got back, so we stayed longer than I had hoped to. But I didn't mind. He was talking about basketball, and although I was no longer playing the sport that drove my Dominican aunt insane for two years, I was impressed by how much he knew about the game and its greatest players. He talked mostly about the Celtics though; about how, throughout the years, he had witnessed the good players traded and legends like Larry Bird born.

Soon after he had finished his speech, we left because Natalie still had to drive back to mom's place to drop me off. The time when we would have to say goodbye to one another had finally arrived. She made a U-turn and stopped the car adjacent to the apartment door. I spoke first.

"I don't want to make this anymore dramatic than I already have to, so let me say what I have to say, and I'll let you do the same... Do you remember what I told you when we went to that Chinese buffet with Penni's family after your high school graduation?"

"No," she said.

"I gave a toast to commencement, which means the end of one thing and the start of something new." I paused for a minute; I wanted the words to marinate in her head, for her to not just hear what I was saying but to feel it as well. "Although you leaving means the end of us living together, it also means the start of something new and exciting for you: a life free from mom and I, freedom to make your own choices without having to rely or depend on anyone else. Independency." She nodded her head. "You're absolutely right," Natalie said.

Now it was her turn.

"Have no regrets," Natalie said. "It's the best advice I've ever gotten." I can't say I was disappointed, because my sister and I were vastly different when it came to words, but I was a bit surprised that was all she had to say. "So I left condoms in the cabinet in your room," she went on. I started laughing. "Seriously, I don't want you getting any girls pregnant."

I looked at her once more before I left the car. We did not hug nor did we kiss each other on the cheek. She knew by now that I didn't have to do either of those things to show that I cared for her. There was an unspoken love between us— a love said more with eyes than with words; more with gestures rather than promises. The important thing was that we knew that that love was there. It would keep her warm as she drove off and away to her new home, while mom and I stayed just where Natalie had left us.



Kiara Pichardo



Karen Melisi

CONTRIBUTOR

ANNEJY BAILEY is currently a student at NECC. She's a computer engineering major and someday she may try minoring in literary studies so that way she will write a story about experience as a first time being an aunt at six years old to my first born niece, the same way the aunt c her mother was only five or six after her mom was born first... crazy coincidence! And there's many more to come... No worries; she'll keep you posted.

KALEIGH BAKER is a sophomore at NECC. She is interested in transferring to a four year art school soon to pursue her dream of becoming a college art teacher. By teaching art, one is always learning; by remaining a student in this way, growing old becomes a much slower process. The work she has submitted is the final from her figure drawing class last semester with Brian Martin, executed in charcoal pencil.

Who exactly is **JAY BIZ**? The wind blowing through the leaves? A wave crashing on the shore? A mythical creature, or a humble being? Perhaps all of these (maybe even none of these). This much is certain: he enjoys the ocean as much as the rushing waterfall, and the color green. Green is good.

ERIN BRENT is a person. This self-proclaimed arts and crafts aficionado enjoys laughing at her own humor and being excessively passionate about everything under the sun. She considers herself to be your typical pop culture enthusiast, often finding inspiration in Wes Anderson movies and the album artwork of her favorite musicians.

His name is **JOSHUA CHAPMAN**, he was born on his birthday, and he is probably going to live until he dies. He should consider himself lucky because he was granted a lifetime supply of oxygen when he was born, and due to forces he cannot quite fathom, there is a giant ball of fire about a gillion miles above h head providing him warmth and energy so that he's not too hot or too cold, and it's wonderful. It's a great time, but it is tough; being a hopeless romantic doesn't quite help his college situation. He is always in love, and he is always tired. Yet for some reason he continues to have an unquenchable desire, and a ferocious smile. Enjoy.

BIOGRAPHIES

WALLACE CLARK IV is a Haverhill native. He is a lover of beauty. His arms are phototropic, reaching towards the infinite brilliant splinters. He is bewitched by the wild and will forever be.

CINDY JASTREM, a marketing professional, enrolled in NECC's Graphic Design Certificate Program in the spring semester and will complete the program in December 2013. Her studies included Digital Photography and Digital Imaging (Photoshop) courses where she discovered a new creative outlet.

MURIEL LUCIA, aged 21. Habitual eccentric who is trying to make a poetry thing happen. You can find her on Facebook (under the same name) if you want to contact her for any reason.

DYLAN MCDOUGALL is a nature-walking, puddle-stomping adventurer with a knack for art and creation. As a poet and visual artist, he now focuses on detail, magnifying creativity with a desire to start conversations and spark ideas in others. "I write to inspire, and to believe I believe there's a way around everything, the trick is to find that one path that brings you to where you want to be. Poetry takes me there."

KAREN MELISI was born in Massachusetts but has spent most of the last twenty years in California. Now back in Massachusetts, she attends NECC in pursuit of a degree in the arts. She intends to marry computer graphics with her first love, fine art.

LUIS SANTANA is a self learned artist in various mediums. He is a shaman by birth and loves beauty of all kind. Born in the Dominican Republic, he was brought to New York before his first birthday, and moved to Lawrence, MA where he has lived most of his life. He loves to take pictures and edit them until they look the way he sees the world at times, and then post them on Instagram, an app he learned to love because of the ability to connect with people from all around the world. You can find him there by his tag @iamtheshaman

EVERSON TAVELAS is as much as the next embittered writer, a product of a war that is refined and condemned by the perpetual struggle to externalize his introspection. In addition to finally receiving an Associate's in Journalism from NECC, and estranging his over-nurturing mother, Everson has plans to transfer to a four year university to receive his Bachelor's. While writing for a magazine in the hopefully near future, he looks forward to writing several books, although he is aware that it may require him, from time to time, to procrastinate without regard to deadlines, productivity, and staring at an inanimate object for eight hours.

CLARE THOMPSON-OSTRANDER is a developing writer, English Composition I, and the College Success Seminar at NECC. She loves reading. When she's not traveling, she's at home with her family or she is writing fiction. She writes as much as she can, because her daughter always tells her, "Thank for my, Mom!" She is grateful to her students, her daughter, her close friends at NECC, and her family for inspiring and encouraging her to write stories.

SAMANTHA TITUS has lived in Haverhill all of her life, but she is an escapist majoring in Liberal Arts: Writing. She hopes to travel anywhere and everywhere, live in different countries, and learn new languages. She believes everybody has a story and it's just a matter of writing it down or listening to it. She has loved reading and writing for as long as she can remember. She is an aspiring writer, so hopefully she is good at it.

TIM VERMETTE is a centuries old dhampir (half-human, half vampire). While his human half has allowed him to live amongst his own kind, his vampire half holds a strong influence over him and continues to grow stronger over time. As a result, he has had to distance himself from the ones he loves to avoid harming them and has resorted to living on the blood of animals. Forever caught between the world of the living and the undead, he has devoted himself to seeking and destroying his vampire father.

THANK YOU to everyone who submitted their work this year. We couldn't do it without you!



PARNASSUS STAFF

ERIN BRENT

TYLER SCHREYACK

KELLY SCHWING

MICHELE SIMON

SAMANTHA TITUS

TIM VERMETTE

SUSAN STEHFEST

GRAPHIC DESIGNER

PATRICK LOCHELT

FACULTY ADVISOR

HOW TO CONTRIBUTE

Submissions to *Parnassus* are limited to NECC students, staff, and faculty, with two deadlines per year. We accept submissions in the areas of art, photography, fiction, poetry, and creative non fiction. Do you think you've got it? We want to see it. Entries are reviewed and chosen democratically each semester by the staff and faculty advisor. Deadlines are announced online and around campus, and *Parnassus* is published at the end of each spring, when students wander with bellies full of freedom and wanderlust.

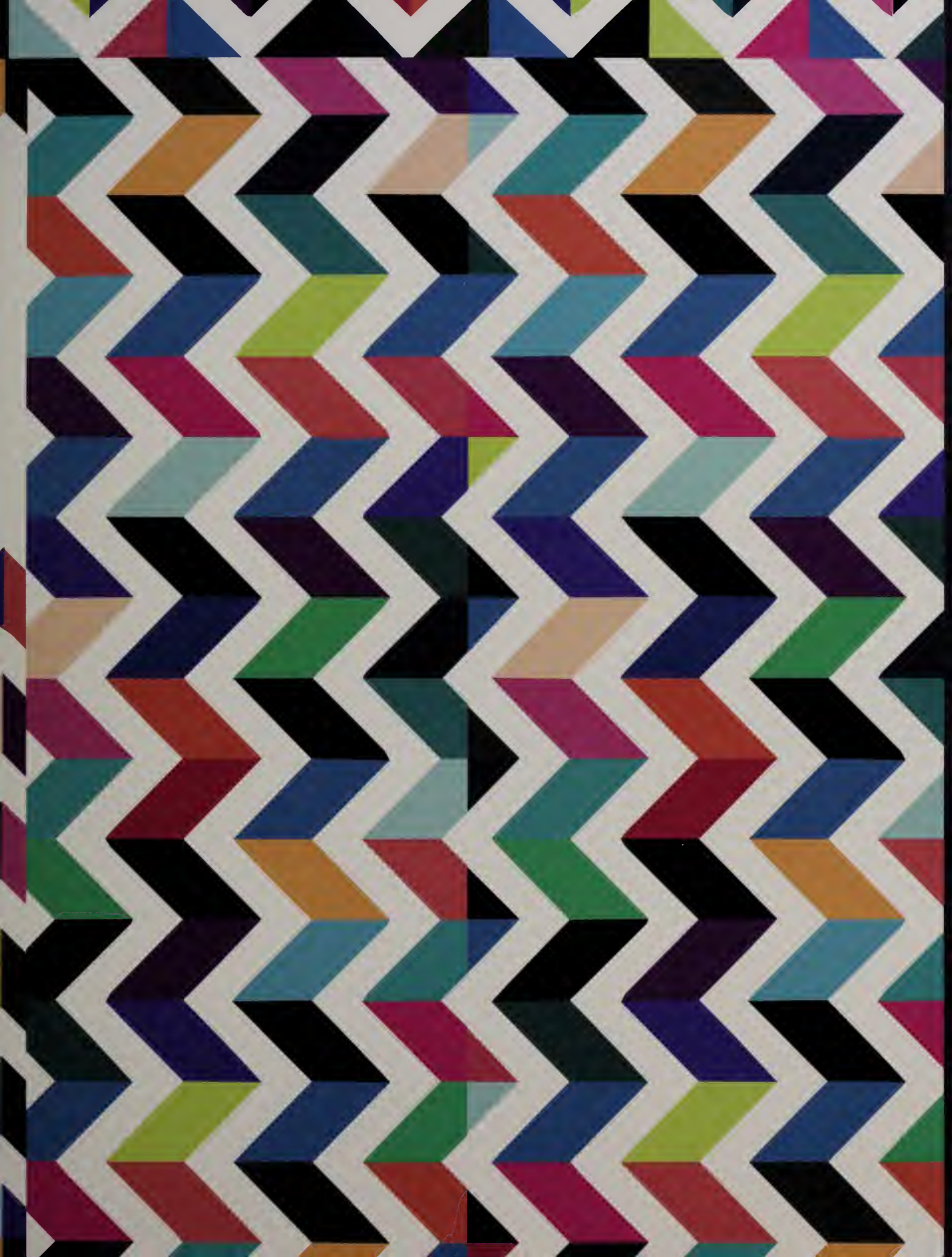
Full information on how to submit your potentially famous work can be found within our oh-so-accessible website:

WWW.PARNASSUSLITMAG.COM

We look forward to reading and viewing what you send us!

Any questions or comments are encouraged — please send them along to faculty advisor Patrick Lochelt: plochelt@necc.mass.edu

Many thanks as always to all of our supporters, submitters, and readers for another great year. We couldn't do this without you!





WWW.PARNASSUSLITMAG.COM